

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002542

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: MASS PREF SOCI KHDP NI

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: AUGUST VISIT TO IKEJA UXO OPERATIONS

¶1. On August 2, Ambassador Jeter, Consul General Hinson-Jones, A/PAO, and ConOff visited the Ikeja Military Cantonment in Lagos to observe the work done by RONCO Consulting Corporation in removing unexploded ordnance (UXO) still remaining after the Jan. 27 explosion there. The Embassy team met with military authorities to discuss GON support for RONCO during their final weeks of operation and transfer of responsibility for continuing UXO operations to GON agencies. The tour concluded with a press conference regarding the U.S.-sponsored clean up effort and the continuing hazards to civilians posed by UXO in the area.

¶2. The Ambassador had expected to be accompanied by the GON Minister of State for the Army Lawal Batagarawa; however, an urgent meeting delayed the Minister's arrival. Batagarawa did tour the Cantonment and addressed the press some hours after the Ambassador's return to Abuja.

¶3. Ambassador Jeter and his team toured the areas cleared by RONCO and met their demining teams. To their obvious delight, the Ambassador spoke in Portuguese to the Mozambican members of the RONCO team and thanked them for the superb work they had done in support of Nigeria and the United States. As of August 1, RONCO had removed approximately 137,000 pieces of ordnance from sectors designated A-3 to A-6. There are thousands, indeed tens of thousands, of pieces of unexploded ordnance, of all calibers, still to be destroyed. A detailed review of RONCO's activities will be provided after the conclusion of their operations.

¶4. The Ambassador, Consul General, and RONCO managers met with Gen. G. S. Emdin, commander of the Cantonment, and his staff. The Ambassador's objectives were: first, to solicit GON assistance for RONCO during the final phase of their work, which involves transporting large quantities of ordnance to a demolition site 65 km. away; second, to ask that qualified GON forces coordinate with RONCO and assume control of the clearance operations without interruption; and third, to obtain GON permission to allow journalists, assembling for the press conference, to tour the site.

¶5. The absence of Army Minister Batagarawa precluded substantive decisions on the part of the Nigerian Army. Without Ministerial approval, General Emdin said that he lacked the resources or authority to provide additional assistance to RONCO or assign other units to work in the area. He also refused to modify existing GON press policy excluding journalists from the munitions depot.

¶6. Gen. Emdin asked the U.S. to continue funding UXO clearance in the Cantonment. He stated that the primary obstacle to immediate deployment of Nigerian Engineering Corps troops to the Cantonment was the Nigerian Army's inability to fund these operations. He requested additional U.S. support for that purpose. Gen. Emdin mentioned they had asked RONCO to give the Nigerian Army all the equipment RONCO had brought into Nigeria. RONCO forwarded this request to their Washington headquarters for consideration. Emdin then produced a RONCO-supplied list of equipment needed to support the work of three ten-men EOD teams; then, he asked if the U.S. could supply the equipment these teams would need to continue the clearance efforts.

¶7. The Ambassador responded that funds for the

Ikeja UXO operations had been reallocated from other projects on an emergency basis, and it was unlikely that additional resources could be found.

18. During this meeting, the Nigerian Army informed the Embassy team that clearing unexploded ordnance from the ATD remained a high priority for them. The Embassy, EUCOM, the British Army UXO advisors, and RONCO have advised against the attempt.

(COMMENT: This presents the prospect that should USG allocate more resources to GON for UXO disposal, it could well be utilized for a project we have consistently advised against. That said, according to the RONCO team, the ATD is not impossible to clear, in fact, RONCO claims that it would not be much more difficult than some of the areas already completed. The problem is simply that demining the ATD will take considerably more time and effort than has been budgeted by anyone. The effort would be slow and exceedingly meticulous, but it could be done. END COMMENT.)

19. The Ambassador spoke briefly with the Nigerian press. He provided a synopsis of Project Avid Recovery and RONCO's activities and warned that the area surrounding the ATD remained hazardous and civilians should not enter the restricted area.

10. At the press conference following his delayed arrival, Minister Batagarawa announced that the continuing threat represented by unexploded ordnance, had compelled the Nigerian Army to transfer its troops to other posts and not immediately repair the damaged buildings within the Ikeja Military Cantonment. In a later discussion with the Ambassador, Batagarawa said that the GON does not plan to abandon the Cantonment but must first check the structural integrity of the buildings before any repair work can be started. After this is done, Batagarawa gave the impression that the Ikeja Cantonment would be reoccupied.

JETER